

**THE MINUTES OF THE
WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING
MARCH 10, 2004**

Handout(s) given out tonight:

1. *NONE*

Members absent:

Also present: Selectman Paul Solomon, Town Administrator Mel Kleckner, Assistant Town Administrator Joyce Munro, Town Accountant Barbara Hagg, and School Director of Finance & Administration Dr. Gerry Missal

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:41 PM.

Acceptance of Minutes

The Committee discussed and the minutes of the March 3, 2004 meeting.

- *Member Heigham made a motion, Member Hofmann seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of the March 3, 2004 meeting.*

Capital Endowment Discussion

The Town Treasurer was not able to make it tonight; therefore, Chairman Widmer is rescheduling this topic until next week's meeting.

Other

Chairman Widmer reminded the Committee the Budget Hearing on Tuesday, March 16th at 7:30 PM is at the Chenery Middle School. Also, the League of Women Voters Budget night is March 22, at 7:30 PM at the Belmont Hill School. Town Accountant Hagg will notify Comcast regarding the March 16th meeting. Both Town Administrator Kleckner and Dr. Peter Holland will make presentations. Chairman Widmer will give an introduction, then after the presentations, the meeting will be opened up. The March 24th Warrant Committee meeting will include the remaining loose ends on the FY05 Budget, regarding the State Aid and remaining moving pieces. He added that initial drafts of the Subcommittee Reports are due March 17th.

Subcommittee Reports

Schools

Selectman Brownsberger reviewed the School Department's FY05 Budget meeting with the Board of Selectmen. The Board did not take a final vote, but there was a convergence

on an allocation that resulted in \$80K in additional spending capacity on the Town's side. With that \$80K, the biggest chunk is to cover the additional Legal amount and smaller amounts to cover things such as the Accounting Intern, Police training, and something with the Payson Park festival. The School part of that additional spending conversation is around \$200K, which restores up to Dr. Holland's Tier 2 reallocation spending. Selectman Brownsberger added this assumes \$100K from Capital Endowment Fund income would be available for appropriation for one of the purposes in the FY05 Budget. They did not assume any additional funds from Minuteman (possibly up to \$40K).

Member Schafer addressed this year's School budget. The Subcommittee wants to commend the School Department and School Committee for coming in with a budget within Town Administrator Kleckner's recommendation. They support using any additional money that may be added back to the Schools to restore Dr. Holland's Tiers 1 and 2. They firmly support the School Committee's efforts to "hold the line" regarding salary negotiations.

Member Curtis asked about the High School's enrollment projection. Member Stratford answered there is a net increase of 44 students within the High School for FY05. The Middle School is projected to decrease about 30 students. The bulk of students are in the 6th – 9th grades. Member Schafer mentioned the actual numbers have exceeded the projections in the past few years.

Member Curtis added that Dr. Holland has been a forceful advocate for his Department. Member Callanan briefly brought up the oil release issue. Town Administrator Kleckner mentioned the Oil Release Subcommittee will give a preliminary report on March 17th, but will defer discussion to March 24th.

Member Stratford brought up the issue of fees – both bussing and activity. The School Committee has gotten a survey of over 100 districts, that will be reviewed in the summer. Member Callanan mentioned the Subcommittee did begin to review the issue of class offerings versus student/teacher ratios.

Member Hofmann asked how many things are in the Town's budget that should be included in the per pupil costs of the School budget. For example, what is the total cost of MECTO? Why are crossing guards included in the Police budget? Member Stratford asked the real issue is the difference of the costs versus the METCO reimbursement. That can be calculated per student.

Member Curtis asked if there is any way we can know other districts are including the same costs. Dr. Missal assured the Warrant Committee we are all using the same costs for the per pupil calculation. For example, the cost of those crossing guards, whether the department they are budgeted in, is included in those per pupil costs in a certain column on the report. Those "pretty common" items (about \$4 million) we report are what most other communities also report. Both Minuteman and paying down of School bonds are included in the \$4 million. Member Hofmann reminded the Committee that we are talking about a 52/48 allocation, but there are costs that are attributed to the Schools that

are included in the Town's budget. Dr. Missal said the discussions of per pupil and allocation costs are intertwined but should be two separate discussions.

Member Kobus reminded the Committee of where the Minuteman expense should be allocated: Town or School. The Committee said it would be revisited again this year.

Member Brusch suggested a summer project might be to compare how some area towns compare in reporting per pupil costs. She also questioned the FY05 School Budget before the Tiers are added back in. Is it level service? She knows there are five teachers added at the High School, but are we eliminating programs or sports? The Tiers are restoring cuts made before the FY04 Budget.

For FY04, Dr. Missal said they did not budget any circuit breaker revenue. We are receiving approximately \$200K, which is offsetting our SPED budget for this year and 50/50 costs for FY03. For FY05, we are anticipating \$275K in circuit breaker revenue. We are reducing our SPED budget the same amount.

Member Heigham said since Town Meeting votes on a total amount, and the School Committee appropriates it within the Schools, why are focusing so much on line item issues. Chairman Widmer said this helps the Warrant Committee make a series of recommendations and build confidence in the School Budget. Dr. Missal added this is the largest Town Department and the most fluid. The School Committee needs to have the authority to make changes as necessary.

Member Heigham is very much opposed to move percentages of the Town Departments to the School Department.

Member Stratford said this year's process of working through the pro-forma and building a consensus and going through the budget allocation process has been a real model that can be used in the years to come. The budget exercise helps build a consensus to be brought to Town Meeting.

Culture and Human Services

Recreation

The Subcommittee is concerned the Recreation Department's revenues are not going to meet their expenses for FY05. Chairman Widmer asked how the fees are managed against their programs. Member Brusch said if the Recreation gets \$614K in fees, the total fees go into the General Fund, which, in turn, gets allocated 52/48. The FY05 total Recreation budget is about \$600K in expenditures.

There is now \$30K in new revenue for Recreation fees included in the Board of Selectmen's budget recommendation. Selectman Brownsberger said the Board of Selectmen's analysis did not take into consideration the new Recreation fees in the available additional spending mentioned earlier this evening. He thinks \$30K should be put towards the new Recreation Department's program expenditures.

Member Kobus said it costs \$452K for the maintenance (personnel, materials, and expenses) of the total fields Rink, and parks (that is within the new DPW budget). When Kevin Looney took over the budget a few years ago, it was transferred to his Department at about \$110K. There is a question as to whether fees should also cover maintenance. Recreation expenditures are almost \$1 million (the \$600K in Recreation Department expenditures and the \$452K for fields, Rink, and parks maintenance).

The Committee discussed some capital items such as a Rink compressor, Zamboni, etc., that may be emergency expenses that need to be fixed quickly. Member Flewelling mentioned the Board of Selectmen should consider boosting up the Warrant Committee Reserve Fund based on their discussion.

Member Tillotson asked what is the criteria the Recreation Department needs to create a program? This will become part of the Revolving Fund discussion. Member Fitzgerald mentioned most of the other times around have a user fee for field maintenance. A lot of the Town's he spoke with had fees that cover the costs of the programs and maintenance costs. Chairman Widmer noted this will be done as a summer project. He added he would like Member Fitzgerald to be on this Summer Subcommittee. Member Stratford have asked to be a part of this summer subcommittee.

Library

The Library's level budget is due to attrition. They are filling all four positions but at a lower rate of pay. There are three items they are concerned about, totaling \$22K: materials budget (would like an increase of \$9K), building maintenance (another \$6K), and \$7,500 for part-time salaries for non-union staff on Sundays at time and half pay.

Member Hobbs pointed out the Library is "out of the loop" of other Town buildings. She pointed out the exterior building needs painting and the phone system is not connected with the Town. Chairman Widmer shares her observation. It is something that we need to put more attention to. Member McCormick shared his frustrations in this topic. This topic will be explored this summer.

Health

The Health Department needs a nurse for vaccinations. Health Director Donna Moultrup has also taken on the Youth Commission. The Subcommittee is recommending a Revolving Fund for their Department.

Council On Aging

Member Bruschi mentioned the fees need to cover the programs. It has been a struggle this year because of two trips that went from Recreation to COA. COA Director Nava Niv-Vogel is trying to coordinate the bussing fees and actual costs of the trips. There was a miscalculation between the COA and Recreation of the Aerobics program. It is now under the COA. This is another Department where a Revolving Fund might make sense. The building is in need of a custodian assigned there. The Director has an intern for a Custodian Training Program (Operation Able) funding a custodian for 19 hours per

week until the summer. She would like someone 19 hours a week after this Custodian Program ends.

The Subcommittee mentioned some specific items within the COA budget. Member Callanan asked if there would be any changes if the building were sold. Member Bruschi answered the lease is through May 2006.

Other

Member Bruschi brought up that the Our Lady's Belmont Street property is going to be on the market for July 1st. Is this something the Town wants to look into?

She also mentioned as of January, we are not housing anyone in the Municipal Light Building. We need to look at what we are going to be doing with that building at that time. The Board of Selectmen has this as a summer to-do item.

Member Flewelling made a motion, and it voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:44 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Recording Clerk